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Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum**

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* A/64/150.

** The information contained in the addendum was received after the submission of the main report.

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Canada

[Original: English]
[27 August 2009]

1. Outer space plays an essential role in all aspects of our everyday life and is becoming increasingly important for our national and economic security. Canada is committed to the maintenance of international peace and security in outer space in order to ensure that outer space remains free for exploration and use, for the benefit and the interest of all countries.

2. Physical conflict in outer space should be prohibited if nations want to continue to benefit from the peaceful uses of space. Any physical conflict that can cause damage or destruction has the potential to create long-lived space debris or derelicts, whose subsequent collisions may create additional space debris and pose a threat to vital State assets, which may be critical for national security. Economic and scientific assets, which are of significant importance to global economic growth and scientific understanding, may also be compromised.

3. A possible transparency and confidence-building measure could be for nations to pledge:

(a) To ban the placement of weapons in outer space;

(b) To prohibit the testing and use of weapons on satellites so as to damage or destroy them; and

(c) To prohibit the use of satellites themselves as weapons.

4. This pledge would follow the 13 June 2006 statement by Mr. John Mohanco, Deputy Director of the Office of Multilateral Nuclear and Security Affairs of the United States State Department, at the Conference on Disarmament stating that the United States has no plans to build space weapons.[1]

5. This pledge would also follow the 8 June 2006 statement by Ms. Fiona Paterson, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Conference on Disarmament, at the Conference on Disarmament reiterating that the United Kingdom has no plans to deploy weapons in space.[2]

6. This pledge would further follow the 1 February 2005 statement by Ambassador Leonid Skotnikov of the Russian Federation to the Conference on Disarmament articulating that Russia would not be the first nation to place a weapon in outer space.[3]

7. The international community has the opportunity to preserve outer space for peaceful purposes through a prohibition on physical conflict in outer space, prior to hostilities ever erupting in this domain. Canada therefore calls upon all nations to initiate the process to achieve this aim by announcing their respective pledges in an appropriate forum.

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[1] CD/PV.1025.
[2] CD/PV.1024.
[3] CD/PV.970.

8. In a statement by Ambassador Marius Grinius on 26 March 2009, Canada put forward the proposal that such security guarantees developed within the Conference on Disarmament could become a foundation for appropriate legal protections.[4]

China

[Original: Chinese and English]
[19 September 2009]

1. China supports resolution 63/68 adopted by the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. Detailed ideas and relevant proposals on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities have been reflected in the joint working paper submitted to the Conference on Disarmament by China and the Russian Federation in 2006 as contained in document CD/1778.

2. China is of the view that appropriate transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space are conducive to reducing possible misunderstandings among countries with regard to their respective activities in outer space, increasing mutual trust, facilitating international cooperation on peaceful uses of outer space and, to some degree, are helpful to guaranteeing the security of outer space activities and realizing the goal of prevention of an arms race in outer space. In fact, commitment to refrain from placing weapons in outer space and to prevent the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space per se would be one of the most important transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities. However, transparency and confidence-building measures are not legally binding, thus cannot plug the loopholes in existing international legal instruments. These measures can be complementary to a negotiated international legal instrument on preventing the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space, but cannot replace the legal instrument.

3. China believes that the best way to prevent the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space is to conclude a new international legal instrument through negotiation. In recent years, China, together with the Russian Federation and many other countries, has been actively promoting in the Conference on Disarmament the negotiation and conclusion of an international legal instrument on preventing the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space. In February 2008, China and the Russian Federation jointly submitted to the Conference on Disarmament a draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, and the threat or use of force against outer space objects, which has been welcomed by the majority of the members of the Conference on Disarmament. China hopes that the Conference on Disarmament will start substantive work and formal negotiation on the draft treaty as soon as possible.

4. China will continue to make joint efforts with all countries to actively promote the prevention of weaponization of and an arms race in outer space and to commit itself to maintaining peace and security in outer space.

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[4] "Statement by Canada in the CD On Tabling of Canada's Working Paper on TCBMs for Space Security", Ambassador Marius Grinius, 26 March 2009, http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/354F156CA8A8D44FC1257585003D51EF/$file/1134_Canada_Space_E.pdf (accessed 6 July 2009).

Russian Federation

[Original: Russian]
[13 July 2009]

1. The Russian Federation considers that confidence-building measures help to ensure peace, security and stability at all levels, to eliminate possible threats and overcome challenges to peace and security, and to prevent military confrontation, while facilitating the management of situations that could lead to international tension. They make a significant contribution to improving inter-State relations and the development of dialogue and cooperation between countries.

2. Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities, in view of the growing dependence of all countries in the world on the outcome of such activities, are an important component of confidence-building measures, which also include measures on land, at sea and in the air, and are intended to achieve similar aims. They are recognized as helping to prevent the emergence of outer space as a new sphere of confrontation, to avoid a new nuclear arms race and to establish conditions for the predictability of the strategic situation in outer space, the security of space activities and the protection of space assets. These measures may become a significant field for broad multilateral cooperation.

3. A number of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities are already included in international agreements on outer space: the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, the 1968 Astronauts Rescue Agreement, the 1972 Liability Convention and the 1975 Registration Convention. Some of these measures are applied by States as a unilateral initiative and are political obligations.

4. Transparency and confidence-building measures are not, however, all-embracing in terms either of their coverage of the various types of outer space activity or of the participation of States in their implementation. Joint work is needed on additional measures in this area that are appropriate to the current stage of development of humanity.

5. In this work it would be useful to consider the results of the study on the application of confidence-building measures in outer space that was conducted by a group of governmental experts over the period 1990-1993 (it is included in the report by the Secretary-General contained in document A/48/305) and also other related proposals introduced by States, including some proposals in connection with General Assembly resolution 61/75.

6. In order to conduct a more in-depth study of issues relating to transparency and confidence-building measures and prepare recommendations for further work in this area, it would be useful to establish a group of governmental experts with the appropriate mandate.

7. The Russian Federation draws the attention of the international community to a number of unfortunate incidents that have occurred in the course of outer space activities: the collision between Russian Federation and United States space satellites on 10 February 2009, and the dangerous proximity of a number of space objects and pieces of space debris to the International Space Station. These incidents illustrate the importance of addressing the issue of foreseeing and providing early warnings of dangerous incidents in outer space.

The Russian Federation is making the following addition to its previous suggestions for possible transparency and confidence-building measures: the exchange of information on foreseeable dangerous situations in outer space. The aim of such a measure would be to prevent or minimize the consequences of dangerous incidents in outer space. Its implementation would consist of providing information to interested countries and international space organizations on the situation in outer space, on possible dangerous incidents that are forecast for a specific time period, such as the proximity and collision of space objects, or the uncontrolled movement out of orbit or planned manoeuvres of space objects. Such information would be provided through an appropriate exchange mechanism, in an agreed volume and format, and would be corrected as a matter of urgency when necessary.

8. Additional proposals of the Russian Federation in relation to possible transparency and confidence-building measures which are both relevant and forward-looking are set out below. This list is not exhaustive in nature but could, in our opinion, serve as a basis for further discussion.

9. Possible transparency and confidence-building measures fall into several categories:

- Measures aimed at enhancing the transparency of outer space programmes;
- Measures aimed at expanding the information available on outer space objects in orbit;
- Measures related to the rules of conduct for outer space activities.

10. Such measures may be carried out in various ways, including exchange of information, familiarization visits, notifications, consultations and thematic workshops:

(a) Exchange of information on:

(i) The main directions of States' outer space policy;

(ii) Major outer space research and use programmes;

(iii) Orbital parameters of outer space objects;

(iv) Foreseeable dangerous situations in outer space;

(b) Familiarization visits:

(i) Expert visits, including visits to space launch sites, flight command and control centres and other outer space infrastructure facilities;

(ii) Invitation of observers to launches of spacecraft;

(iii) Demonstrations of rocket and space technologies;

(c) Notification of:

(i) Planned spacecraft launches;

(ii) Scheduled spacecraft manoeuvres which could result in dangerous proximity to spacecraft of other States;

(iii) The beginning of descent from orbit of unguided space objects and the predicted impact areas on Earth;

(iv) The return from orbit into the atmosphere of a guided spacecraft;

(v) The return of spacecraft with a nuclear power source on board, in the case of malfunction and danger of radioactive materials descending to Earth;

(d) Consultations:

(i) To clarify the information provided on outer space research and use programmes;

(ii) On ambiguous situations, as well as on other issues of concern;

(iii) To discuss the implementation of agreed transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities;

(e) Thematic workshops on various outer space research and use issues, organized on a bilateral or multilateral basis, with the participation of scientists, diplomats, military and technical experts.